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SEBASTIANO AT SUPPER.

[Michael Angelo's most famous pupil was Sebastiano del Piombo — so called from his being made Keeper of the Papal Seals, through which appointment he was enabled to live without work. But for his excessive indolence and self-indulgence, he might have disputed the palm with any of his cotemporaries. All Art-pilgrims will remember his masterpiece in the Church of San Gian Grisotomo, Venice.]

I.

— HA! ha! How free and happy I am,
Here in my rollicking, careless calm,
With never a scowling monk to gibe,
Or harry me for the crab-like way
They tell me I work. That beggarly tribe,
Priors and abbesses, deem that a day
Must count in the life of a picture. Fools!
They think that they grow like mushroom stools.
— "Here's so many feet of bare, blank wall —
Here's so many days to fresco all."
Bah! Through the Father's grace, that's past,
And I'm free — do you hear, friends? — free at last,
With only the Seals upon my mind;
As idle a Fraté as you'll find
In Rome or out of it. Here are we,
Gandolfo and Messer Marco — three
Right merry old roysterers, faith, we be;
The night is before us; with many a chorus,
We'll set the rafters a-ringing o'er us;
For I vow I never could tell which art —
The brush or the bow, most swayed my heart.
— Yes, yes — his worship Ippolito
Once served me a sorry trick, I know —
The time he sent — (he was love a-craze,
And wanted the work quick done) — relays
Of horses for speed, when I went to paint
The Donna Guelma: *she* was the saint
His prayers were said to, in these old days!
Well — would you believe it? Nathless, 'tis true;
I left my pigments behind and brought
My viol, as uppermost in my thought:
— And what did his Cardinal graceship do?
He smashed and he crashed the strings right through.
And so, thereafter, I could not shirk,
For music, a single day of work.
Aye, aye — be sure 'twas a brutal shame,
But it helped in a month to build my fame,
For I need not tell you the picture's name.

II.

Heigho! with a sweet relief I sigh,
As I lounge so masterless here — you by,
Dearest of comrades — sigh to think
How Michelagnolo pinned me down,
Granting me scarcely leave to wink,
Impaled all day on his frescoes brown
(Lout that I was to fear his frown!)
No toil can tire *him* out: he'll be
Still fresh — you mark me — at ninety-three,
With muscles like his own *David's*. Well
It was that we quarreled; for who can tell,
If under his grand, resistless will,
I might not have been a captive still?
I think the Maëstro hates me though:
My debtor I made him long ago,
And it rankles his terrible pride. You see,
I went to Ischia once to paint
The lovely Marchesa; (What a saint
Of a wife Colonna had! — and he —
But we'll tell no tales; it's all forgiven,
Now that he's been so long in heaven);
And the picture I gave the master, who
Had learned to worship that face, as you
Worship Our Lady's; nor would I touch
In boot, a *biaccho*: 'tis so much
To have him beholden! And that is how
The liking of yore is hatred now.

Ah, well-a-day! I have loved my art,
Beautiful mistress she ever was!
And yet we are not unloth to part,
Though bound together for years — because
I inwardly groan to come and go,
At beck of the best; and I leave her so.
Besides, I own, of the perilous stuff
The world calls fame I have had enough.
To Giulio, Perino, and such, 'tis best
I think, on the whole, to leave the rest.

— I'm garrulous: why have you let me waste
My breath a-chattering? Only taste
This vintage, and own it might cheat the Fates,
And see you, my friends, the supper waits.

— Margaret J. Preston.

SUGARING OFF.

"FIRST-RATE day for sugar makin'! Last night froze everything stiff, an' the sun has riz as clear an' bright as a new brass button."

And Squire Strong rubbed his rough palms complacently as he bent over the glowing stove upon which his wife was frying her breakfast cakes; then, with a sidelong glance from beneath his shaggy eyebrows at the girlish figure just emerging from the pantry, he continued:

"I jest met Worth's Ben, out here in the road, an' he offered his help up in the sugar orchard to-day."

The pretty face in the doorway flushed a little, but the rosy lips remained firmly closed, as Mrs. Strong, looking up from her work, remarked, in her pleasant, motherly fashion:

"Oh, he's got home, then — has he? How thankful Mrs. Worth'll be! She misses 'im dreadfully when he's away, an' no wonder, seein' he's all the child they've got left. When did he come, squire?"

"I dunno; why, I declare, I never thought to ask 'im. Did *you* know that he'd got home, Say?"

"No."

The pantry door and Say's lips closed with a snap that was significant of something — *wrong*, judging by Mrs. Strong's anxious glance from the door to her husband's face — *right*, if one might trust the shrewd old squire's answering smile:

"Don't you worry, ma'am," he whispered, reassuringly, with a nod toward the closed door. "It'll all come out right in the end. Never you fear but we'll see our little girl settled down in a happy home of 'er own, close to us in our old age. Give the young folks line enough, an' they'll twist it into a marriage noose, fast enough, if they're only jest *let alone*."

Mrs. Strong smiled rather doubtfully.

"I'm afraid —" she began; but at that moment in walked Say, cream pitcher in hand, and a color in her cheeks that almost put to shame the scarlet of the asparagus berries that nodded knowingly at her from their perch above the little looking-glass.

"Shall I put the cakes on the table, now, mother?" she asked in very much the same tone with which, the next moment, she rebuked the encroachments of her favorite kitten:

"Scat! What are you up to now? you hateful cat!"

The breakfast passed off without its usual accompaniment of pleasant chat and good-natured merriment; for Mrs. Strong was too much troubled with her daughter's unaccountable behavior, and her husband was too thoroughly engrossed with his plans for the day's work, to be as talkative as usual; so that Say, who seemed, somehow, to have suddenly developed a new element in her character, had the field entirely to herself; a privilege that she availed herself of in a way that aroused even her gentle mother's indignation. "I do wish, Say," she said, at last, with unusual sharpness, "that you'd stay tormenting that kitten so. If you're going to give her that bit of meat, why don't you do it, an' not keep puttin' it close to 'er nose, an' then snatchin' it away? I do hate to see any creatur tanterlized so."

"I'm only playing with her, mother. She rather likes it, and," in a lower tone, "so do I."

"I think," interrupted the squire, who, having finished his meal, was now briskly preparing to take his departure for the scene of his day's labors, "I'll send Jim over to Jordan's an' borrow his kettle, for if I have Ben Worth to help me, we might as well be tendin' two fires as one; and, Say," turning to his daughter, "if you don't mind the trouble, I wish you'd bring me a luncheon some time in the evenin'. I don't s'pose I shall get 'through till pretty late — an' some hot coffee, and, if you have 'em handy, a few hot buttered biscuits won't come amiss after eatin' a cold dinner an' supper. Got my dinner pail ready, ma'am?" to his wife; and as she hurried off to bring the nicely packed lunch, he whispered with a comical glance under his daughter's down-cast lids:

"Ben asked after you, this morning; but I thought I wouldn't ask 'im in, just at breakfast time so."

"I'm glad you didn't."

There was a good deal of petulance, with a not quite hidden undertone of disappointment in the tone, that the listener was shrewd enough to interpret, and wise enough to pretend ignorance of.

"Well, I shall look for you with my supper any time before nine," he said, in his briskest, most matter-of-fact tones; while Mrs. Strong, who had entered just in time to hear the concluding words, remarked helpfully:

"I'll go with you, Say, if you're skittish about goin' alone."

"Oh, dear, no! I'm not such a fool, I hope, as to be afraid to go over ground that I've known every foot of all my life;" and with this energetic disclaimer of her mother's imputation upon her courage, Say whisked up a pile of plates, which she deposited in the sink just in time to catch, through the back window, a full view of a young man, tall, strong armed and broad chested, whose light, closely curling hair was covered with a jauntily worn jockey cap, while the trousers beneath his loosely fitting blouse were of a fashionable cut and material, that

made Say's sharp little nose take to itself an extra elevation, as she muttered, scornfully:

"Why didn't he wear an old hat and trousers, as anybody else would? Broadcloth pants! They'll look pretty, I guess, after a day's work at emptying sap buckets." And, thriftily indignant, the little housewife rattled her dishes into the pan with a vim.

"He's growing to be a regular dandy, a perfect sap-head!" she mused, half angry, half regretful, as she leaned forward, involuntarily, to catch a last glimpse of the tall figure disappearing in the wood path that led to the sugar orchard; "and," with a little defiant twist of her dish towel, "if there's anything on the face of the earth that I do hate and despise, it's a *silly man*."

It was a clear, cold night, and the snow that carpeted the wood path crackled frostily beneath Say's light tread, as, with her pail of steaming coffee, she hastened along in the direction of the sugar orchard, where her father was already getting a little impatient for the appearance of his promised lunch.

The moon was at its full, and shed a flood of light upon the snow-laden branches above her head, until every separate twig seemed a ghostly finger pointing, as with one accord, toward the sugar orchard.

"Forward — to your fate!" whispered imagination, rendered suddenly bold by the stilly beauty of the time and place, and, for a moment, the girlish face assumed a look of dreamy tenderness, in keeping with its fair yet half weird surroundings; but the next her favorite watch-dog, common sense, gave the alarm — the spell was broken, and, with an angry flush at her own foolish fancies, she hurried forward, and muttered:

"My coffee will be as cold as the moonshine, if I stop to watch that."

And yet, as she caught a glimpse of the ruddy fire-light through the trees, she paused for a moment, toying nervously with the tassels of her hood, as through the stillness she could distinctly catch the sound of a familiar voice that was neither her father's rough, unmusical bass, or Jim's boyish treble, but a clear, ringing tone that sent its cheery echo down the long, wooded avenues, until it seemed as if the snow spirits had caught the pleasant sounds, and were tossing them gleefully from one to the other, in the shadowy tops of the pine and fir trees.

"He's there still," Say muttered, in a pettish undertone, "but I don't know as that's any business of mine;" and she stepped boldly forward into the lighted circle, and without a look to right or left, marched straight up to where her father stood carefully watching the boiling sap in a great iron kettle that, swinging lazily from its crane of tough birchen wood, presented its round, black sides to the attacks of the roaring, wrathful fire with an equanimity worthy of notice.

"Here's your coffee, father. How are you getting along?"

"First rate! We've had an uncommon good day; sap's run like a sluice all day long, an' I've been on the clean jump every minute, till I'm pretty well tuckered out. Ben!" raising his voice high above the noisy bubbling of the boiling sap, and the equally noisy snapping and roaring of the fire beneath — "Ben, here's our luncheon. Let Jim tend your fire, an' you come an' get yer coffee before it cools."

A heavy step crunched the snow beside them, and Say's brown eyes were uplifted in careless recognition.

"How do you do, Ben?" with a glance at the soiled and bespattered broadcloth, "you're quite a stranger to your country friends; I didn't even know that you were at home, until father happened to mention it this morning."

"I only came last night."

The young man's tone was subdued, and he cast a timid, appealing glance at the coldly indifferent face of the girl beside him.

She laughed rather derisively:

"You must have felt particularly anxious to see your friends at home, to spend the whole day out here in a neighbor's sugar orchard."

"Oh, Ben knows what he's about!" interrupted the squire, laughing. "He knows that I can tell him more news in one day than he could hear at home in a week."

It was a happy diversion, restoring the young man's self possession, and giving Say time to feel somewhat ashamed of her uncalled-for sharpness, and the two were soon chatting together with the freedom and frankness of life-long friends and neighbors.